The 2011 PossePlus Retreat Report

The PossePlus Retreat is a unique space where students, faculty and staff get together to participate in a powerful discussion about a topic relevant to the campus community.

This spring, more than 2,500 college students at 36 colleges and universities across the United States will engage in dialogue on the topic of the Millennial generation. This is a rare opportunity for you to voice your ideas and experience this important national conversation.

When:
Day, Month Date to Day, Month Date, 2011
Buses will pick you up at X a.m. in front of the Location.

Where:
Name of Retreat Location
City, State (spelled out)

Registration:
Please register by Day, Month Date, 2011 to Name at email@school.edu. In your email, please tell us the name of the Posse Scholar who invited you.

Bring:
1. Item 2. Item 3. Item 4. Item 5. Item

Write name here has invited you to attend this year's PossePlus Retreat.

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introduction

PossePlus Retreat: a weekend-long gathering of college students, faculty and administration intended to promote dialogue around an important issue identified by Posse Scholars.

In 2011, The Posse Foundation and its 36 partner colleges and universities hosted a series of off-campus retreats—called PossePlus Retreats (PPRs)—with over 2,500 participants. Attendees included Posse Scholars, members of the general student body, faculty and administrators. Since 1992, PPRs have been part of Posse’s programming and are intended to facilitate dialogue within and among selective colleges and universities. They also serve to help campuses build more integrated communities.

The 2011 PPRs entitled The Millennials: What’s on Your Mind? explored the defining characteristics and future legacy of the Millennial generation through a series of small and large group activities that spanned the course of three days. The Posse Institute—the research arm of The Posse Foundation—polled participants at the beginning of the retreats, allotting 30 minutes to complete a 59-question survey. In total, 2,427 students from the Millennial generation and 162 faculty members and administrators submitted their responses anonymously.

A number of findings stand out. Of Millennials surveyed:

- Over 50 percent claimed that jobs and the economy are the most pressing issues for the United States today.
- Most are technologically savvy. They prefer the Internet to television as a source of entertainment, they get most of their news online, and almost all have a Facebook account.
- 90 percent have volunteered in the past year, and most profess a strong sense of social responsibility.
- The majority (70 percent) are highly optimistic about their own future and that of their generation, with 58 percent believing they will leave the world better off than they inherited it.

This report explores these findings in greater detail and provides interesting insights into how this unique group of Millennials perceives national, local, campus and personal issues.

context

The topics for PossePlus Retreats are generated each year from focus groups comprising Posse Scholars. The 2011 PPR invitations were sent to thousands of students across the country and included the following language.

Every 20 years or so, a new generation emerges and challenges, in one way or another, the cultural, social and political status quo. People born within a certain time frame share a lived experience and are remembered for a unique characteristic that defines them. As the children of the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers, what will define this generation—The Millennials?
Coddled. Progressive. Entitled. Entrepreneurial. Savvy. Narcissistic. Engaged. One commentator applauds your global connectedness just as another decries your lack of commitment to anything substantive. Are you that hard to pin down? And for those who don’t have the access, technology, information and power that the term ‘Millennials’ has come to connote, where is their place, their voice within this generation?

You’ve come of age in an unstable world. Columbine. The 2000 election. 9/11. Terror. War. Shrinking job market. Rising expectations. Google. Gaga. Idol. Obama. Change has been your norm. Seven years ago Facebook was called Facemash. Six years ago the first YouTube video hadn’t been uploaded. Three years ago Twitter was still a glimmer in a programmer’s eye. Fresher. Cooler. Sleeker. Smaller. Easier. Yet with each new app, it becomes harder to pause to ask a few simple, yet timeless questions:

• Will you spark change or go with the flow?
• Will you lead a life you choose or a life that’s been chosen for you?
• What do you believe in and care about?

For the PossePlus Retreats of 2011, Posse Scholars voted for a very unique topic. This year’s Retreat is your time to collaborate, contemplate, and create the life you want and the legacy you will leave behind both collectively and individually. At this year’s Retreat, we’ll discuss what it means to be living as a Millennial; what it means to be happy; what it means to be charged with leading a world you’re only beginning to shape but will soon inherit.

We’ve heard from the experts. Now it’s your turn. Use it.

The description above was intended to encourage student attendance at the PPRs and, together with various other forms of marketing, resulted in more than 2,400 Millennial participants nationwide. The findings here highlight these students’ perspectives on, among other things, politics, social issues, personal well being, and the future of the country.

group characteristics

The 2011 student PPR survey respondents had the following characteristics.

• The average age was 19.6 years.
• 81 percent of respondents were born in the United States
• 62 percent were female and 38 percent male.

Below is a graph of the racial/ethnic breakdown of the student group based on self-identifications.
millennial perspectives

THE ECONOMY

The recession that started in the late 2000s has adversely affected the financial outlook of today’s generation. Ninety-six percent of Millennial respondents believe that the economy is a pressing issue, and over 50 percent claim that jobs and the economy are the most important social and political issues facing the United States today (see Chart 1.1). With unemployment rising to the highest rates since the Great Depression, the job landscape for recent college graduates looks increasingly bleak. Despite being on track to graduate from some of the most selective colleges in the country, the Millennials surveyed show signs of concern about their income-earning prospects. More than 80 percent of respondents reported that over the past year they were occasionally or frequently worried about finding a job after college, overwhelmed by finances and generally worried about the economy. A third of the student respondents also believe that their parents are most often concerned with whether they will be able to get a good job after graduation.

“One of the biggest problems for our generation is fixing the economic mistakes of the last generation.”

“The economy is in a horrible situation, and it is up to us to change it.”

“The economy is an issue for every generation, and I think that it hit us the most because we are the next ones to enter the job market, and with the economy down, it affects our abilities to find a job and start our independent lives.”

“I have no idea how I’ll support myself financially—even with my education.”

“As a senior, the most common thing I hear is how hard the job market is right now and ‘Good luck.’”

“Nothing’s for certain. We’ve seen our parents lose their jobs and their savings. We know our lives aren’t going to be any more stable. We don’t know if higher education is worth it, but we know if we don’t go, we won’t be able to survive. There aren’t any jobs. We don’t know what to do or what will happen to us.”

“We are coming of age in an economic climate that indicates most of us won’t even be able to replicate the social class we grew up within.”

Given the current economic state of the country, is it possible for today’s young people to one day achieve the American Dream—a notion traditionally associated with obtaining a good job, buying a home, and having a family? Today, this concept that once defined the United States is being put to the test. When asked, “Has the American Dream changed for your generation?” 64 percent replied, “Yes.” Many students indicated...
they believe the American Dream has become harder or impossible to achieve, in part due to a less abundant job market. Others feel that the American Dream has become more narrowly defined and is now more about obtaining great wealth and is thus available to many fewer people. In fact, recent reports have revealed that the Millennial generation can expect to be less financially secure than their parents. For example, a 2007 report on economic mobility in the United States found that men in their 30s are making less than their father’s generation did at the same age. Studies like these seem to justify Millennials’ growing concerns about their financial futures and the economic health of the country.

“Before, the American Dream used to be about finding a better life. Now I feel it has transformed to just getting by.”

“It’s harder to attain middleclass status, because you need much more schooling, and the cost of schooling has risen dramatically.”

“I think more people where I’m from are just trying to get out of the hood.”

“Before it was about being content with a family, home, job. I feel like our generation wants to make more of a difference that impacts the world.”

“It’s no longer owning a house and having a family but becoming financially successful.”

“I feel that my generation wants and expects more than any generation before.”

“For my parents’ generation the American Dream was to come here and get a job that would help provide for their family and give their children a better life. For me the American Dream is having a high paying job and making a difference in other peoples’ lives.”

POLITICAL VIEWS

The Millennials surveyed expressed interest in politics and government affairs. In the past year, the large majority have occasionally or frequently engaged in discussions about politics (87 percent) and the economy (89 percent). This group believes that keeping up to date with political affairs (92 percent) and influencing the political structure (79 percent) are at least somewhat important to them. Seventy-five percent have occasionally or frequently communicated their opinions in public for a cause or campaign, and 65 percent believe that, compared to their parents, they are as aware or more aware of politics and current events (see Chart 1.2). Furthermore, 71 percent of the students are currently registered to vote. This is much higher than 45 percent—the percentage of Americans ages 18 to 24 who are registered voters.
I do my best to stay up to date, and I write my senator and reps if I feel strongly about an issue. I also vote. 

"Democracy requires my political participation and involvement."

"I actively keep up with current affairs. I follow the political scene. I participate in all voting cycles."

"I constantly watch the news and express my political opinion."

"Before coming to college I never cared about politics, but now I am trying to become more engaged."

The majority of the Millennial respondents hold liberal political views (55 percent are Democrats, and 67 percent consider themselves to be at least somewhat liberal), and even more support the increased role of government in solving the nation’s problems (see Charts 1.3 and 1.4). When given two options, 1) government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals and 2) government should do more to solve problems, 78 percent chose the latter.

Most students selected President Obama as the face of their generation, and his election was widely considered among the most significant and memorable historic events of their lifetimes. While they regard Obama’s rise to the presidency as historic, only half of these same Millennials are satisfied with the way he is running the country. Despite these concerns, most (86 percent) said they would vote to reelect Obama in 2012.

technology and social habits

Having grown up during a time of huge technological advances, Millennials are a tech savvy generation that is well-connected and more globally focused than any other. Not surprisingly, the Internet is the biggest source of entertainment for the majority of student respondents (62 percent), and most spend at least 6 to 10 hours online per week for
2.1) Which of the following technologies is the biggest source of entertainment for you?

- **Television**: 13.0%
- **Video Games**: 3.5%
- **MP3 Player**: 8.7%
- **Phone (talking, texting only)**: 10.1%
- **Radio**: 2.3%
- **Internet**: 62.4%

2.2) Roughly how many hours per week do you spend online (for purposes other than work or school)?

- **0**
- **1–5**
- **6–10**
- **11–15**
- **16–20**
- **>20**

2.3) What is the most common way you keep in touch with:

- **Email**
- **Social Networking Sites**
- **Text Messages**
- **Phone Calls**
- **In Person**
- **Other**

purposes other than school or work (see Charts 2.1 and 2.2). In addition, most students (72 percent) receive their news online with the majority checking it at least occasionally during the week.

When they are not online or watching television, this student population is text messaging their friends. Texting was added to cell phone plans in 1991 and is now the most common way that Millennials keep in touch with their peers. While this technology is the favored way these students communicate with each other, they use phone calls to keep in touch with their parents/guardians, suggesting a generational gap in technology usage (see Chart 2.3). Texting has also become more
popular than email for these students. Sixty percent send more than 20
texts per day, while only 36 percent receive as many emails per day.

In addition to texting, many Millennials stay in contact with friends
using social networking sites such as Facebook, which launched only
seven years ago. Almost all of the respondents (97 percent) have a
Facebook profile, and 88 percent of those who do check it at least twice
per day. Their social networks are vast with 60 percent having 500 or
more Facebook friends and 91 percent having at least 200 friends (see
Chart 2.4). Though Facebook allows Millennials to maintain hundreds of
social connections, the median number of these connections considered
close friendships is only 30.

Millennials enjoy sharing their opinions and passions with different
communities. In addition to Facebook, 30 percent of students surveyed
have a Twitter account and 21 percent have a blog. Their blogs focus
on a variety of topics with the most popular being personal blogs (45
percent), blogs about music (15 percent) and blogs about the arts (12
percent).

The biggest advantage of a web-connected world, according to
survey respondents, is the ability to access information (47 percent). Also
named among the top advantages were the ability to communicate easily
with more people no matter where they exist geographically (26 percent)
and increased globalization and awareness of the world (12 percent).
Sixty-three percent identified the loss of personal interactions and
meaningful connections as the biggest disadvantages of a web-connected
world. Other top disadvantages included loss of privacy (25 percent)
and the Internet’s tendency to distract users from more important matters
(11 percent). These perceived negative aspects notwithstanding, most
students (75 percent) believe that the Internet ultimately makes life easier.
ADVANTAGES OF A WEB-CONNECTED WORLD

“The internet allows you to instantly exchange information with people on the other side of the planet.”

“It allows for social networking despite distance and allows for science and similar departments to advance quicker.”

“Almost all information is accessible instantly with the click of a button.”

“It’s easy to find out what is happening in the world.”

“It breaks the boundaries of communicating with friends and family around the country.”

“Everything is so much easier and quicker to do.”

DISADVANTAGES OF A WEB-CONNECTED WORLD

“Excessive connection through internet ultimately isolates people from the ‘real world.’”

“I have 900 friends on Facebook, and I’m still lonely.”

“It’s easy to become distracted by things that don’t really matter.”

“The internet consumes too much time.”

“We’re too caught up in technology. We don’t really branch out and we lose face-to-face communication.”

“A disadvantage is not knowing if people are truly themselves on the other side of the internet.”

“You have to be on guard because news and rumors spread quickly.”

social responsibility

When asked to rate themselves and their generation on several personal qualities—academic drive, charitable giving/service, work ethic and ability to relate to others—the Millennials surveyed consistently ranked themselves and their generation high. They do believe, however, that others perceive their generation to be weak in these same areas. When asked to list the top three strengths and flaws most often ascribed to Millennials, the responses from both students and faculty/administrators tended to agree. The top listed perceived strengths were that Millennials are tech savvy, smart, driven, accepting/tolerant (of other races, cultures, genders, etc.), altruistic and community focused (see Table 3.1). The most cited criticisms of the generation were that Millennials are lazy/unmotivated, dependent on or addicted to technology, self-absorbed, and coddled/immature.
“My generation is probably more open-minded about controversial issues and more technologically advanced.”

“As a generation I think we understand the ‘connectivity’ of the world better, and we are more open to ideas.”

“As a Millennial, I think my generation is misunderstood when it comes to being entitled. Our parents worked hard to provide for us and wanted what was best for us, yet other generations criticize us for having everything and not suffering enough.”

“Because of technology, other generations have claimed we are isolated, detached and less engaged. I would claim we are more interested in the things going on today and in our world.”

“I think our generation is seen as such lazy and apathetic kids, but I think our generation has a lot of potential and power.”

“What is misunderstood most is the thought that we are extremely lazy and immature individuals. We’re exposed to so much more at a younger age and our lives are set at a fast pace since birth, so I think other generations don’t understand the pressure put on us to be successful, beautiful, and intelligent.”

“I believe our generation is viewed by others as not having enough drive. However our generation is definitely motivated to make changes to society, the economy, etc.”

| TABLE 3.1 | Students | | | Faculty/Administrators | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strengths Heard Most Often About Millennials | # | % | Agreement Rating* | # | % | Agreement Rating* |
| Tech savvy | 766 | 16.5% | 1.4 | 49 | 17.1% | 1.5 |
| Smart | 529 | 11.4% | 1.8 | 22 | 7.7% | 1.9 |
| Go-getters | 498 | 10.7% | 1.8 | 24 | 8.4% | 2.0 |
| Creative | 349 | 7.5% | 1.6 | 17 | 5.9% | 1.6 |
| Tolerant/Accepting | 253 | 5.4% | 1.8 | 27 | 9.4% | 1.7 |
| Connected | 229 | 4.9% | 1.7 | 14 | 4.9% | 2.0 |
| Global-minded | 178 | 3.8% | 1.8 | 10 | 3.5% | 1.8 |
| Altruistic/Community-minded | 134 | 2.9% | 1.8 | 24 | 8.4% | 2.3 |
| Multi-taskers/ Efficient | 120 | 2.6% | 1.7 | 7 | 2.4% | 2.0 |
| Environmentally conscious | 97 | 2.1% | 1.9 | 11 | 3.8% | 2.1 |

Agreement Rating is an Average: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4=Somewhat Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree
Despite the criticisms about the Millennial generation as self-absorbed, the responses from survey participants suggest a keen interest in social responsibility. Over 90 percent of students have performed volunteer work in the past year, and a large number rate themselves and their generation as good or very good in terms of their charitable giving/service (62 percent for themselves and 44 percent for their generation) and their ability to relate to others (84 percent for themselves and 52 percent for their generation).

The Millennials surveyed indicated a desire to protect the environment, promote equality, and support different ways of life. This cohort believes that helping others who are in difficulty (83 percent), helping to promote racial understanding (71 percent), improving their understanding of other countries and cultures (82 percent), and adopting “green” practices to protect the environment (63 percent) are “very important” or “essential.” Furthermore, when asked to rank the importance of finding love, starting a family, making a difference in the world, and being financially secure, the Millennials ranked making a difference in the world highest.

“A lot of people in our generation seem to be more willing to tackle the problems previously not addressed.”

“I believe that enough of our generation has the drive to make the world better in some way. We see the problems and want to change them.”

“I believe that my generation is so incredibly driven and so socially aware that we will change the world for the better.”

“I plan to make a difference and gather people that are motivated, driven and focused on helping this world become better.”

“We are driven, talented and able. If we live up to our potential, we can change things.”

In addition, the majority of this Millennial group (83 percent) believe that race is still an issue for their generation, and 52 percent frequently have discussions on the topic of race. Of those who think the subject of race is an issue for Millennials, only 13 percent believe that at least some progress has been made, and 23 percent believe that race will always be an issue for all generations.

“I think that race is less of an issue than it used to be but that equality hasn’t been reached yet.”

“There is still ignorance about different cultures that exists, which creates stereotypes and racism.”
“It’s still a major part of the social structure, so it affects each and every one of our lives.”

“Race is a weighted and multi-dimensional issue that will continue for every generation.”

“Racial problems have declined, but it will always be an issue. It will take much longer for it to become obsolete.”

“Race continues to be a source of social conflict/tension. It impacts who has access to opportunities, social services, etc.”

This group also believes that gender inequality persists, with 69 percent indicating that women do not have the same opportunities as men in the United States (see Chart 3.1). Many also think that certain liberal social trends are good for society, including more mothers of young children working outside the home, more people of different races and more gay people marrying each other, and more gay and lesbian couples raising children (see Table 3.2). Finally, their expectations of themselves as a generation are high. Fifty-eight percent are optimistic that their generation will leave the world better off than they inherited it.

**future outlook**

Most students in the survey (70 percent) believe that their future looks bright (see Chart 4.1). After graduating from college, only 39 percent plan to move back home with their parents/guardians and 85 percent of
those plan to stay for less than two years. By age 25, however, 87 percent believe they will have left home for good and 82 percent think that they will have become financially independent.

After graduating from college, 40 percent of the Millennials plan to immediately enroll in graduate school, 39 percent to get a job, and 11 percent to travel. Of the remaining 10 percent, many plan to volunteer and join organizations such as the Peace Corps, Teach for America, and AmeriCorps (see Chart 4.2). Over time, this cohort expects to become successful in their careers and highly educated, with 92 percent intending to someday obtain a graduate level degree and 88 percent of the opinion that they will someday have their dream job (see Charts 4.3 and 4.4).

Respondents also ranked “finding love” and “starting a family” lower than “being financially secure” and “making a difference in the world.” This may help to explain why these Millennials intend to wait longer than previous generations to start families, with close to half planning to wait until they are almost 30 to get married and have children (see Table 4.1).

### TABLE 4.1

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<th>Survey Respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td>Desired Age at Marriage</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>29.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
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*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey  
**Source: Eurostat (2010) and United Nations Statistical Division (2010) and National Statistical Offices. (Data for United States is from 2006)
CONCLUSION
The findings from this survey show a group of educated, diverse Millennials who are culturally aware and socially responsible. While this generation grew up in a time of war and has witnessed several political and social upheavals, they have also experienced great advancements, such as the birth of the Internet. These students use technology to gain awareness of global situations and pay close attention to the social and political events that are shaping the world. While they are worried about the current state of the world—including the state of the economy and the environment—their hope and optimism are real. They see themselves as caring deeply about issues and people beyond themselves, and they believe in the promise of their futures. The findings of the survey show that these Millennials refuse to be defined by the negative perceptions of their generation or by the norms of generations past. They intend to write their own futures.

END NOTES:
4) U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2010

THE Posse FOUNDATION, INC.
The Posse Foundation was founded in 1989 because of one student who said, “I never would have dropped out of college if I had my posse with me.” That simple concept of sending a team of students—a Posse—together to college so they could back each other up became the impetus for a program that today has identified 4,245 students. These students have been awarded $487 million in leadership scholarships from Posse partner colleges and universities and are persisting and graduating at a rate of 90 percent.

Posse is a national program with offices in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York and Washington, D.C. Posse Scholars are students from diverse backgrounds who have attended urban public high schools and gone on to win full-tuition, merit-based scholarships from Posse partner colleges and universities for their extraordinary leadership potential. By the year 2020, Posse and its partner institutions of higher education expect to have between 5,000 and 7,000 Posse alumni in the workforce. These graduates will form a new professional leadership network, one that will more accurately reflect the changing demographics of the United States.
### Appendix A (NOTE: Data is for ALL survey participants—students, faculty, and administrators)

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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1592</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Blank</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi/Multiracial</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (non-white)/Latino</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Blank</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>